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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 000166

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PINR KDEM CH TW

SUBJECT: TAIWAN NATIONAL SECURITY CHIEF RESIGNS AFTER
STORMY TENURE, CITING HEALTH REASONS

Classified By: AIT Director Stanton. Reasons: 1.4 b/d

¶1. (C) National Security Council Secretary General Su Chi telephoned the AIT Director on February 11 to say he would announce his resignation later in the day, citing health and family reasons. Su was perhaps President Ma Ying-jeou's closest confidante in government and took the lead in implementing the President's opening to China. Still, he came under harsh criticism from lawmakers of both major parties for not soliciting their input on policy, culminating in the Legislative Yuan's rolling back part of the Ma administration's agreement to open Taiwan to more U.S. beef imports. Su identified his replacement as Victor Hu Wei-chen, an ex-diplomat and a former deputy at the National Security Council (NSC) and at the National Security Bureau (NSB). The switch is unlikely to result in any major policy changes, since President Ma is the main architect of cross-Strait policy, but it could help smooth strained relations between the administration and the Legislative Yuan. End summary.

SU IS OUT ...

¶2. (C) NSC Secretary General Su Chi called the Director on February 11 to say he was resigning because of exhaustion. Local media later reported that Su's successor would take over on February 23, after the lengthy Chinese New Year holiday. Su, who had suffered from cancer, told the Director he had been working without a day's rest for the 20 months of President Ma's administration and for a year before that on the President's campaign. He said he could no longer "carry on." Su noted that he had been "haggling for a long time" with the President about when he could step down, and now that Taiwan's "situation had stabilized a bit," Ma had finally accepted his resignation.

¶3. (C) Su had been a member of Ma's inner circle with overall responsibility for implementing the President's detente with China, and he had made himself regularly accessible to AIT and U.S. government officials. Still, Su had come to be vilified in the media as the personification of the administration's perceived secretiveness and inability to communicate effectively with lawmakers from both the ruling Kuomintang (KMT) and the opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). In particular, lawmakers accused Su of keeping them in the dark about the administration's negotiations with the United States to open Taiwan's market to a broader range of U.S. beef imports. The Legislative Yuan ultimately took action to roll back the accord by barring imports of U.S. ground beef and beef offal, claiming they were too risky for consumption.

... HU IS IN

¶4. (C) Su told the Director the President "instantly" accepted his recommendation that Victor Hu Wei-chen replace him as National Security Advisor. Hu, who speaks excellent English, was Taiwan's representative to Singapore from 2005 to 2007 and to Germany from 2001 to 2005. He was NSC Deputy Secretary General from 1999 to 2001 and Deputy Director of the National Security Bureau from 1993 to 1999. After joining the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as an intern in 1971, Hu served in many Taiwan representative offices overseas, including in Washington, Chicago and South Africa. Hu was born in Shanghai in 1947 and received a master's degree in foreign studies at Georgetown University in 1973. Hu is 62 years old and, according to Su Chi, a "devout Christian."

¶5. (C) Su Chi said he had promised President Ma he would continue to offer advice on cross-Straight relations and on foreign policy issues, and would assist Hu in settling in at the NSC.

COMMENT: SIGNIFICANT POLITICALLY BUT NOT FOR POLICY

¶6. (C) Although Su was a loyal lieutenant to Ma, his resignation will likely be a political plus for the President, who is trying to patch up relations with the Legislative Yuan and to improve the image of his administration as woefully lacking communication skills. Since Ma personally sets cross-Straight policy, it is unlikely that the change will result in any significant change in Taiwan's approach to China or other security issues. It was

TAIPEI 00000166 002 OF 002

not immediately clear whether there will be other personnel changes in Taiwan's security apparatus. The Director plans to meet Hu as soon as possible to ensure continuity of AIT's excellent relationship with the NSC.

STANTON